



**FAMILY & CHILDREN**  
**SERVICES** A SOURCE OF HOPE

Turning Life's Challenges into  
Beautiful Moments



2022 Annual Report

# Dear Friends

## *A Letter from our Chief Executive Officer*

2022 was a year full of challenges and opportunities. Through each one, I witnessed the perseverance and dedication of our staff as we dealt with funding reductions, hiring challenges, and the increasing needs of the people we serve. Challenges will always be there, but our ability to overcome these challenges speaks to our strength, dedication, and commitment to our mission.

As I retire and reflect on the past seven years at the Agency, I am grateful for the staff, board members, volunteers, and partners that I have been able to work with. Because of their commitment, we have achieved many significant accomplishments.

We provided critical child welfare, behavioral health, and crisis intervention services to thousands of children and families. We also provided advocacy for low-income families on statewide issues.

Additionally, our focus on recruiting and retaining staff led to the creation of the RISE Leadership Academy, a staff tuition reimbursement fund, increased salaries, sign-on and staff referral bonuses, and other staff benefits like a floating holiday.

We achieved a successful COA accreditation, implemented new programs, and established new community partnerships.

We embedded Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives into our strategic plan and hired a DEI Manager who is responsible for ongoing events and training. We also implemented the Intercultural Development Inventory, the premier cross-cultural, research-based assessment of intercultural competence used by thousands of individuals and organizations to achieve diversity and inclusion goals.

When I joined Family & Children Services, I set out to move the culture to one of more openness and understanding. I wanted staff to know that diversity at all levels makes us stronger. When there is an organizational culture that embraces diversity, everyone feels they belong, we make more informed decisions, and create better outcomes for our clients and community.

Family & Children Services will remain diligent and creative in addressing emerging community needs and keeping vulnerable children and families at the heart of our work. In closing, I am grateful for being a part of this legacy agency and now turn the baton over to Diane Marquess to lead into the future.

Thank you so much for these last seven years. I know we were able to create so many positive outcomes because of you.

  
Sherry Thomas-Cloud, MSW, LMSW



## Our Mission

Family & Children Services supports, strengthens, and preserves the safety, well-being, and dignity of children, individuals, and families.

### *A Letter from the President of the Board of Directors*

I have seen incredible work being done by many nonprofits in the last 30 years, but Family & Children Services rises above in terms of its perseverance, resilience, and positive outcomes for the most underserved people in our community.

When Sherry announced that she would be retiring as CEO in 2023, we knew we had a responsibility to search broadly for her replacement. There were more than 300 applications, with 83 candidates screened from Michigan, the Midwest, and beyond. Twenty candidates were interviewed, and seven were presented to our search committee. We had a diverse group of candidates: 61% were women, 39% were men, and 22% were people from various racial and ethnic backgrounds. Diane Marquess, Clinical Services Director for Family & Children Services, was ultimately chosen as our next CEO based on her deep knowledge of the Agency, its history, current environment, and her vision for its future.

Sherry moved the Agency through the many challenges of the pandemic, ever-changing workforce, increased client needs, and decreased public funding for our programs. We have been fortunate to have had a CEO so connected and knowledgeable in the field at the helm for as long as we have.

Diane was unanimously chosen because we know that she will continue the great tradition of Family & Children Services supporting and strengthening the safety, well-being, and dignity of those we serve while also adapting and adjusting to new challenges that lie ahead. I have confidence that the transition from Sherry to Diane will be seamless, and our mission will remain front and center as we move into the next chapter of Family & Children Services' extraordinary 120-year legacy.

*Brian Hudson*  
Brian K. Hudson

### *A Letter from our Incoming Chief Executive Officer*

I have had the great pleasure of working at Family & Children Services for the last 28 years. In that time, I have built connections to partners in the community and state to help create better outcomes in the behavioral health and child welfare areas. I have advocated for individuals, youth, and families to set policies that affect our clients and have worked to create innovative programming to meet emerging needs.

I was part of a team that shaped our newest strategic plan and remain committed to its vision for the future of the Agency. I am thrilled to continue the extraordinary work we do here at the Agency as the new CEO. I know that we have the most dedicated and knowledgeable staff who will continue to meet the needs of our most under-resourced community members.

We will remain steadfast in our work to build an inclusive, diverse, and equitable work culture that values staff and their lived experiences. We know that different staff need different things to be successful, just like our clients, and I am committed to continuing a culture that meets those needs.

I look forward to building on the legacy of this Agency, created by the great leaders and many dedicated staff that came before me, as well as creating connections with community partners and donors to establish more impact and positive outcomes for our clients, staff, and community.

*Diane Marquess*  
Diane Marquess



# Living a Life of Abundance and Joy



**Ashley Widrig's life did not go as planned.** As a pediatric occupational therapist, she had an incredible job, a fiancé, a new house, and plans for children. That all changed when her fiancé left abruptly, leaving Ashley to pick up the pieces.

In her job, Ashley had the fortune of working with children from all kinds of families. One such family was Howard and Robin VanValkenburg, parents who had brought in several of their foster children for therapy. Ashley and Robin had grown close while caring for Robin's children, so one day Robin asked if Ashley would be interested in becoming a respite caretaker for twins who were placed in Robin's home.

Born at just 30 weeks, Lydia and Harper had extensive medical needs. Harper's medical needs were so dire, nurses said goodbye to her after each shift assuming she would not live to their next one. Due to their high risk, the twins were set to be separated, but Robin knew to be truly healthy they should remain together, so she accepted the placement of them both and recruited Ashley to help.

Despite suffering a devastating heartbreak that changed her future, Ashley had the capacity to care for those babies, and she knew that the twins might just be the perfect, most unexpected way to build her family.

Ashley met the girls just months after they were born and was immediately smitten. She began foster care training and, after the girls were discharged from the hospital, watched them on weekends to help Robin. Though the girls were more dependent on Ashley than the average newborn, she fell head over heels in love.

By May, Ashley had completed her foster parent training and had placement of the girls full time. Finally, on the day before Thanksgiving, the adoption of Lydia and Harper was official. Ashley was a mom.

The "wait and see" medical approach to the girls was never good enough for Ashley. She knew that getting care before the needs became crisis level would be easier for everyone, especially the children. She knew the best thing for Lydia and Harper was to get a dedicated team on board to proactively care for their needs.

As a single, full-time working mom to one-year-olds, life was wonderfully chaotic. Thankfully, Ashley had a team of family and friends eager to help.



Ashley's mom became her nanny, taking care of Lydia and Harper during the day. Ashley built a care team of doctors, nurses, and therapists devoted to creating healthy outcomes for the twins. Additionally, Ashley's "work family" was always there to help in big and small ways.

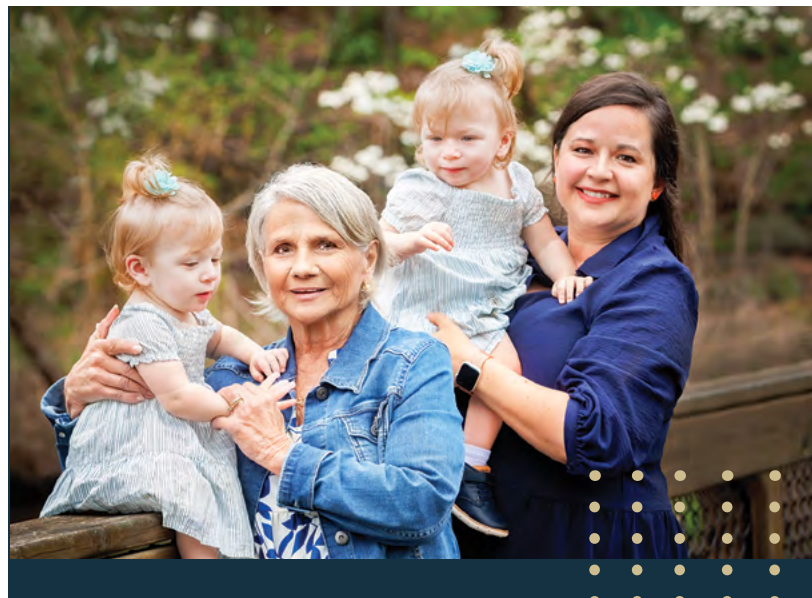
Because of the community Ashley built around them, the girls have developed beyond every expectation. Ashley credits the love Lydia and Harper knew from the start to Robin and Howard in addition to Korey Stone, Licensing Specialist at Family & Children Services, as major factors in their progress. The care team that meets medical, emotional, and physical needs has also allowed the girls to feel loved and cared for beyond measure. Ashley's mom, dad, and sister, who love the girls as if they were biologically born to Ashley, are another wonder, ensuring health and happiness for the girls.

Then there is Ashley, who switches from occupational therapist to mom regularly. She has learned to ask for help, knowing that the more people who love the girls, the better they will be.

Ashley, as their mom, has forged progress, milestones, and developmental miracles on her daughters because of her love and the team she's built. The girls, who

were not expected to live, let alone thrive, are doing just that – living a life of abundance and joy, just as toddlers are supposed to do.

Ashley, Lydia, and Harper have been able to create something truly beautiful out of even the most brutal and traumatic circumstances. Recently the girls called Ashley "mom" and told her they loved her for the first time. A common thing for two daughters to say to their mom, of course, but for these particular daughters and this specific mom, those words exemplify not just the beautiful and unpredictable nature of life but the miracles and mercies of it, too. ■



**Foster parents give hope to children and teens in need** – changing the course of their life in miraculous ways. When foster parents provide a safe, nurturing environment, children grow physically, emotionally, and socially. In return, foster parents experience the power of love in life-changing relationships.

People from all walks of life make good foster parents. Whether you're single or married, own your home or rent, vulnerable children in our community need you!

**To learn more, visit our website:** [fcsource.org/foster-care-start](https://fcsource.org/foster-care-start)



# Therapy Happens



**The COVID-19 pandemic changed behavioral health, specifically how it's offered and accessed as well as the increasing need for services.** Across the community, providers chose to deliver outpatient and telehealth options through remote work, leaving the public sector with a shortage of professionals to provide the behavioral health services needed to those on Medicaid.

Susan Davis, Program Manager for Clinical Services said, "We have experienced an inability to recruit and retain licensed master level therapists and have witnessed the vacuum that has been left for the most under-resourced in our community as a result. We knew to serve our most vulnerable populations, we needed to redesign our behavioral health programs to mimic the draw of outpatient and telehealth practices for providers as much as possible."

The redesign of our Family and Community Treatment (FACT) program allows therapists to focus on providing therapy treatment to individuals and families. Therapists are a part of collaborative teams that include case managers, administrative staff, and supervisors. This ensures therapists get to provide the therapy they love and spend less time meeting documentation requirements for Medicaid insured clients, as the support team is able to process that for them.

Therapists in this new model will grow as clinicians because they will be gaining experience and training

in evidence-based models. Though the pandemic opened the door for newly graduated therapists to work from home, we know outcomes are better for vulnerable populations when they are treated by a workforce with access to expert supervision, team support, and consultation.

"We have a long-standing reputation in the industry for training and employing highly skilled and experienced therapists. Because we work as a team in a supportive environment, every client has access to the experience of all our therapists. That means that even if a client is assigned to one of our newer therapists, the client is still being served by Agency clinicians with decades of experience in a variety of settings, communities, and challenges. It's impossible to replicate that kind of evidence-based, team approach on your own. That's why our community partners consistently look to us to provide therapeutic services," Susan said.

We know the only way to live out our mission well is to listen to the needs of our community and adjust our programs to meet those needs. Right now, the increased need for behavioral health services and the decreased access to therapists is at a critical junction. Thanks to a generous grant, we can meet the current needs of therapists and clients alike. ■



**Join our team!**



# Families First

Our Families First program is an intensive, home-based service that works with families who have had contact with Child Protective Services and involves working with the family on needs such as crisis intervention and safety planning, parenting education, conflict resolution skills, addressing concrete needs, and linking families to community services.

Sierra Braxton, Program Supervisor for Families First, loves to be in the trenches. "Our team wants to help families and is committed to the success of our families. We like that it is very hands-on! We want families to understand that we're here to help, not judge, and we'll do whatever we can to help them feel successful."

Recently, a family needed their house cleaned and organized. The team worked for hours to fill a dumpster of garbage to make more room for the family. The whole team came together to make the process go as smoothly and quickly as possible.

Sierra, who has also worked in Foster Care, moved to Families First because she wanted to help families at risk of having their children placed in Foster Care. "I get to meet families where they're at and help them. We have time to sit down and formulate a plan with them

to accomplish their goals. Families miss our staff when the 28-day program is completed, and we miss them too. It's really fulfilling to see the difference you make in peoples' lives with this job."



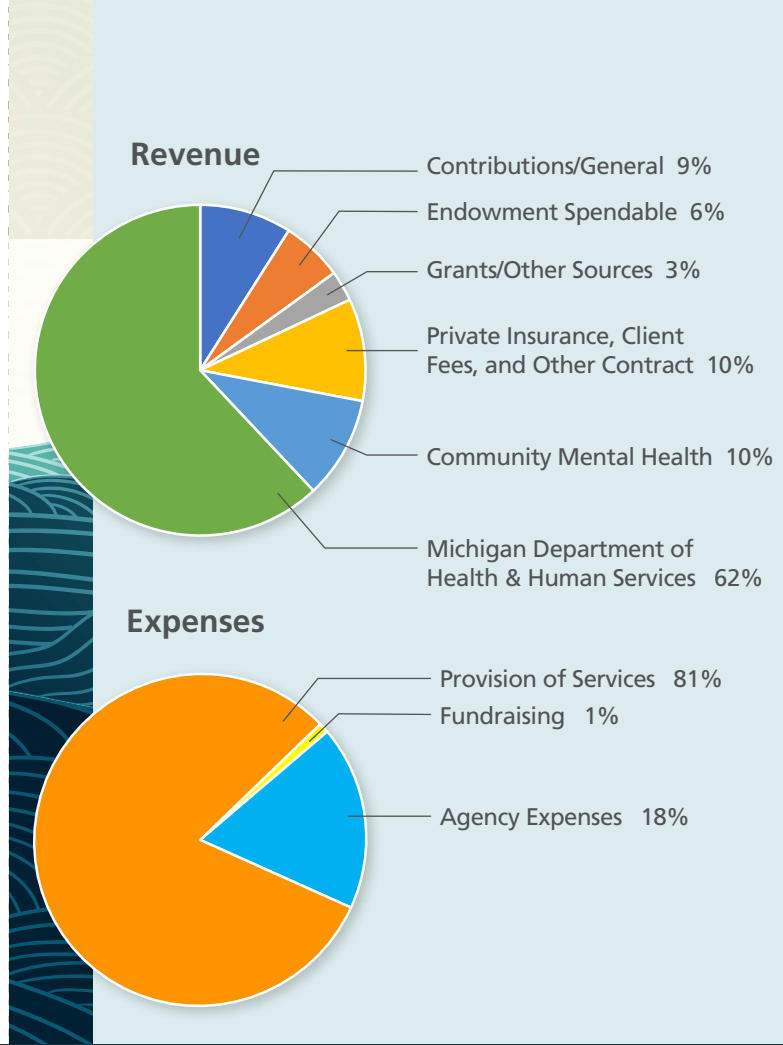
Parenting is a challenge no matter who you are, where you come from, or the size of your support system. Studies prove children do better with their biological families whenever possible. That's why family preservation remains a priority for Family & Children Services, and **we know that a proactive approach, like that of Families First, is our best chance for positive outcomes for our clients and their families.** ■



# 2022 Financial Highlights

Family & Children Services' operating revenue for 2022 was \$9,379,748. Friends of the Agency generously donated \$1,057,028 in contributions. Agency Endowment Funds supported programs with \$845,645. Non-cash Gifts had an estimated value of \$160,000. Operating Expenses, excluding depreciation, were \$10,383,164.

The Agency continues to have a solid balance sheet and strong relationships with our donors and community partners. Forgiveness of a Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) Loan through the CARES Act provided fiscal stability through the past two years and funds have been encumbered to be utilized into 2025. Our emphasis in 2023 is on retaining our highly-trained staff and hiring to fill essential social work and clinical positions in a challenging labor market. Having a vision and strategic plan remains vital, both fiscally and in providing needed services to our clients and communities.



## Paycheck Protection Program

The forgiveness of the PPP loan through the CARES Act allowed us to create opportunities that aligned with our strategic plan and react quickly to a changing workforce dynamic and escalating community needs.

One such opportunity was the creation of a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Manager position who is responsible for continuing DEI initiatives within the Agency.

We were also able to increase wages to improve the economic conditions for our staff.

Staff training, development, and the creation of the RISE Leadership Academy were additional priorities for us. These allow us to reduce turnover by investing in the professional development of staff. The RISE Leadership Academy offers a curriculum that will broaden the knowledge and skills of high-potential

staff who are identified for future or promotional leadership roles.

Tuition assistance programs were set in place to help staff who wish to obtain or finish a degree that will lead to promotional opportunities.

A three-year managed network service contract was approved by the Board as well. This contract provides a team of experts with broad IT knowledge and expertise, continuous 24/7 monitoring of systems, and dedicated response time. This is a proactive approach which allows us to identify issues and upgrades before they become problematic.

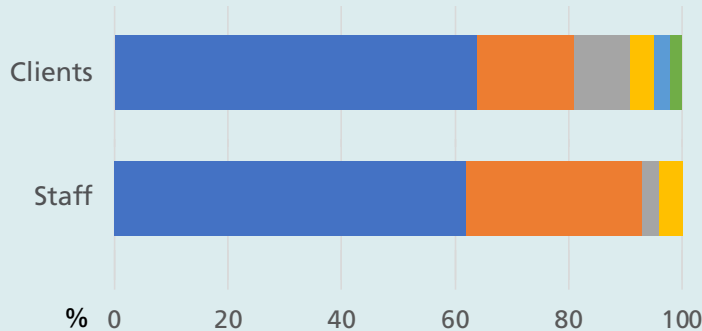
By establishing a workforce that looks like and understands our client base, attracting and retaining quality staff, and having a dynamic network service that allows for no downtime in essential documentation, we are able to create a better foundation on which to meet client needs.



# 2022 Agency Demographics

## 5,055 Individuals Impacted

- White/Caucasian
- Black/African American
- Multi-racial
- Hispanic/Latinx
- AAPI/Native American/other
- Declined



- More than 80% of those served have income under federal poverty guidelines
- 60% under the age of 19
- 12% identified as LGBTQ+

### Customer Satisfaction Ratings

- 96% felt treated with respect
- 96% felt satisfied with all services
- 96% felt staff were sensitive to culture/ethnicity



## Impact and Outcomes

### Family Preservation and Parenting Support

*Families First, Foster Care Supportive Visitation, Supervised Parenting Time, Parenting Support Services*

#### 1,170 Individuals Impacted

- 100% of high-risk families remained together after services
- 95% of caregivers demonstrated increased parenting skills after services

### Foster Care and Adoption

*Child Placement, Case Management, Family Visitation, Licensing, Recruiting, Caregiver Support*

#### 2,658 Individuals Impacted

- 54% of children achieved permanence within 24 months

### Behavioral Health

*Family and Community Treatment, Case Management, Outpatient Counseling*

#### 754 Individuals Impacted

- 100% of youth/families improved or maintained their functioning

### Crisis Intervention

*Mobile Crisis Response (MCR), Therapeutic Residential Youth Services*

#### 473 Individuals Impacted

- 62% of crisis resolved without out-of-home placement needed

## DONORS

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## Community Partner of the Year Award



This year, Family & Children Services awarded **Jeff Patton, CEO of Integrated Services of Kalamazoo (ISK)**, the Community Partner of the Year Award. Sherry Thomas-Cloud said, "Jeff Patton has a long history of being a leader in the mental health field. His knowledge and advocacy has been crucial to the Kalamazoo community. Jeff has been a champion of Family & Children Services over the years, and I can think of no one else so deserving of our Community Partner of the Year Award."

Family & Children Services and ISK have partnered to provide home-based treatment, case management, facility-based respite, emergency services for youth designed to meet youth and families in their homes and in the community, and crisis residential services for youth. Our ability to work with ISK allows us to deliver hope to the most marginalized children in our community.

## Lifetime Achievement Award

**Sherry Thomas-Cloud, CEO of Family & Children Services**, was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)!

Sherry has demonstrated repeated outstanding achievements and has been recognized beyond the social work profession. Her contributions will have a lasting impact through her dedication and outstanding creativity.

We are thrilled NASW-Michigan recognizes the incredible legacy Sherry Thomas-Cloud has had on our organization, the profession, and the state.

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## Featured Donation: Walmart Shopping Day

In fall 2022, our friends at Walmart approached us about sponsoring an event for the children in our programs. We decided on a "shopping" day for our clients where the children could pick out items for their siblings, caregivers, teachers, or other loved ones from items straight off Walmart's shelves.

Trucks full of toys, clothes, home furnishings, self-care items, and gift baskets paraded through our parking lot where they were promptly unloaded and categorized by over 50 Walmart employees turned Family & Children Services volunteers. Gift bags and paper were brought out in the hundreds and laid out on tables ready to create gifts from our clients to their loved ones.

As the children shopped, Walmart volunteers helped them choose sizes and colors and then helped bag and beautify

the gifts. When the lines got long and children got antsy for their turn, volunteers guided them to tables filled with coloring and crafts to occupy their minds. Once children and families were done shopping, they enjoyed a meal provided by Walmart as well.

Thanks to our many community donors, like Walmart, we can be a source of hope for youth and families in our community. We are so grateful to those of you who continue to invest in our most under-resourced communities through Family & Children Services.





## Meet Melissa Mehalko, Director of Operations

Melissa M. Mehalko is our new Director of Operations. In this position, she oversees HR, finance, quality, IT, and facilities for the Agency.

Melissa feels that staff are an organization's best asset and loves supporting the people who support the people. Melissa enjoys problem solving with the team to find solutions that work for everyone. She finds great enjoyment in finding ways to save money and streamlining processes to give staff more time with their clients. Since she started, Melissa consolidated HR processes, implemented new software systems, and helped kickoff the Agency's Wellness and Engagement Committee.

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We would like to extend a special thank you to the following United Ways and to those who supported Family & Children Services with their Designated Gifts.

AT&T United Way Employee Giving Campaign  
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 United Way of St. Louis

This Annual Report recognizes those who gave between January 1, 2022 – December 31, 2022. While every attempt was made to report names accurately, please accept our apology if we have made an error. If you would like a change in the way your name is reflected in future reports, please contact the Development Office at 269.488.7936. Our most sincere appreciation to everyone who contributed to Family & Children Services throughout 2022.

\* Funds are held at the Kalamazoo Community Foundation.  
 \*\* Funds are held at the Battle Creek Community Foundation.  
 ^ All or a portion of this gift was made to Pack a Child for Camp.

## How You Can Help

Your support is critical to ensure that every child has a safe and stable place to call home.

**HANDLE WITH CARE Annual Fund** is a unique safety net providing Agency clients with basic needs and critical services where there is no other source in the community.

Our Summer Enrichment program provides opportunities for children served by the Agency to participate in activities over the summer such as day and overnight camp, academic tutoring, art and music classes, sports, and more.

Holiday Giving matches client families and children with individuals, schools, community groups, and corporate donors to provide holiday gifts and gift cards for groceries over the holiday season.

Our Year 'Round Pantry collects in-kind gifts from the community to support client needs such as blankets, bedding, coats, household items, personal care products, diapers, back-to-school items, toys, and books.

Visionary Club donors provide planned gifts to support future generations of children and families.



To make a gift, please contact Courtenay VanderMolen, Director of Resource Development, at 269.488.7936.



**Secure online donations are welcomed at [fcsource.org](https://fcsource.org).**

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